

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHMO #5745/01 3411136
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 071136Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5728
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 005745

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/07/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: GOLOS INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE DUMA ELECTION

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns for reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a December 4 press conference, the USAID-funded voting rights NGO Golos reported widespread violations and irregularities in the December 2 State Duma elections. While much of its information is anecdotal, Golos did provide cursory statistical findings of anomalies, most notably major increases in absentee and home voting, discrepancies between manual and electronic voting, and the increase in registered voters over the past four months. Golos will publish on December 11 a detailed assessment of the elections based upon reports and documents from its 3,000 observers combined with a review of the election results published by the Central Elections Commission (CEC). While some Golos election observers encountered problems, Golos observers were present at over 2,000 polling stations during voting and ballot counting. End Summary.

A First Look at the Statistics

¶2. (SBU) On December 4, Golos Director Liliya Shibanova and elections experts presented the initial evaluation of the Duma elections. From reports collected by its 3,000 independent journalist-observers and more than 1,500 election-day calls to its hotline, Golos described widespread violations of election laws, harassment of some observers, and failure of regional election commissions to follow regulations. Examples included a few dozen polling areas refusing entry to accredited Golos journalists or forcing them to leave, refusal of some district and regional elections commissions to provide results to observers, and pressure on students and employees from state enterprises to vote for United Russia. Nevertheless, Golos was able to be present for the counting of ballots and immediate posting of the results in more than 2,000 of Russia's approximately 95,000 polling stations.

¶3. (SBU) With the caveat that Golos had yet to conduct a full-scale analysis of the data, elections experts Arkady Lyubarev, Aleksandr Kynev, and Andrey Buzin presented an initial look at telling statistics from the elections:

-- Number of registered voters: Lyubarev, the Director of the Elections Monitoring Program at the Independent Elections Institute, first noted that the number of registered voters had increased from 107 million on August 8 when the electoral districts were announced to more than 108 million on election day. One region, Nenets Autonomous Okrug, increased the number of voters on the rolls by 10% during that time. "While there may be a very good explanation for this, it is certainly legitimate to question where these million voters came from."

-- Discrepancies between manual and electronic voting sites: Lyubarev cited a difference that he had observed between

Moscow city precincts with electronic balloting and those without. At the 45 sites with electronic balloting, United Russia averaged 50% of the vote, and at the 76 with manual counts, it averaged 56%. Conversely, the Communist Party (KPRF) and Yabloko both did better at the electronic sites: KPRF averaged 15% with electronic balloting, and 13% without; Yabloko drew 6.7% with electronic balloting, and 5.1% without.

-- Decrease in spoiled ballots: Kynev noted that, contrary to expectations, the number of spoiled ballots (e.g., those made invalid as a protest vote) fell from 3-5% in the spring regional elections to just over 1% in the Duma election, even though the "against all" option had been removed from the ballot and the number of parties on the ballot had been reduced.

-- Increases in Absentee and Home Voting: Andrey Buzin, the Chairman of the Interregional Society of Voters, reported that the number of absentee ballots had almost doubled from 0.9% of the votes cast in 2003 to 1.7% this year. (Note: "Absentee ballots" are not the mail-in type like in the United States, but are instead official permits for voters to vote at a polling site other than where they are registered. Voters must still cast their ballots in person. End note.) He noted that an even greater influence on the outcome was the number of people who had voted at home, which increased from 5.5% in 2003 to 6.4% in 2007. "Going to people in their homes or in hospitals is not illegal, but it is another example of the pressure that the local authorities are applying to the citizens."

14. (SBU) Kynev was certain that the vote had been manipulated, and spoke of "administrative pressure" placed on students and employees of government institutions, but he also acknowledged that it would be impossible to prove fraud in these cases. "When citizens mark the ballot by themselves, it's a legal vote, but we still understand that official pressure has an unwanted impact on the voter's choice." Kynev also acknowledged that, fraud or no, United Russia would still have won a majority in this election, but that the major difference was between a simple and a constitutional majority.

15. (SBU) Buzin and Kynev were dismissive of claims that the elections were open and honest. Buzin noted that Golos had already been criticized by CEC Chairman Viktor Churov for making unsubstantiated claims, none of which would stand up in court to overturn the election result. But he placed the blame back on Churov and the regional CECs for violating the Election Law by withholding access to data that would support such claims, such as the refusal of some local elections commissions to provide certified copies of the results at polling stations until after they had been collated by the regional elections commission. Buzin also noted that regardless of whether it would hold up in court, it was obvious that the Soviet-style 99% turnout in the North Caucasus was fraudulent. Kynev dismissed comments endorsing the election results by some human rights leaders, such as Moscow Bureau of Human Rights Director Aleksandr Brod, whom he labeled as co-opted by the Kremlin. "Brod can no longer be considered an independent observer. He has accepted an appointment by the Kremlin and can now be controlled by them."

Next Steps

16. (C) Shibanova predicted that Yabloko, the Union of Right Forces (SPS), and the KPRF would challenge the legitimacy of these elections in court. Golos Deputy Director Grigoriy Melkonyants doubted that these cases would find any traction in the courts, and thought that the KPRF would have the best chance at showing actual damages. Speaking candidly, he said that it appeared that the regional elections committees had siphoned votes from the KPRF for the benefit of United Russia, Just Russia (SR) and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR). He cautioned that he did not want to make an official judgment until Golos had a chance to organize and

digest the data from observers and the CEC.

17. (SBU) Golos plans to spend the next week analyzing the election results and the reports from its observers throughout the country. Kynev reported that on election day Golos observers had collected the notarized election results (called "protocols") on site at more than 2,000 polling places across the country, and that Golos would analyze and compare these protocols against the results published on the CEC website. Golos plans to report on its findings on December 11.

BURNS